Stone with Howard (right) on the set of 'JFK'

MR. CONSPIRACY

LARRY HOWARD, THE MAN BEHIND OLIVER STONE'S 'JFK'

A LITTLE FREE ADVERTISING NEVER HURT. at the JFK Assassination Center in Dallas, Texas, photos of director Oliver Stone and Kevin Costner hang prominently on the walls. They compete only with the purple-and-black T-shirts that read: "JFK/an Oliver Stone film" (in fact, a reproduction of the May 18 cast-party shirt that can be yours for a mere $21.95). "Kevin Costner has been to the center many times and Oliver Stone, too," says its president, Larry Howard, who founded the center two-and-a-half years ago. "It certainly has magnetized people here."

In the beginning, however, it was Stone who was magnetized by Howard. During the summer of 1990 when the Academy Award-winning director was researching his controversial new film, *JFK*, he received a fax from Howard that read, "We have uncovered the real truth behind the assassination." Shortly thereafter, Howard, an ex-contractor, had a check from Stone for $80,000 and was named the director's adviser. "We furnished Oliver Stone with over 400 photographs pertaining to the assassination, twenty video tapes, and twenty-three different witnesses, including Marina Oswald Porter." Add to that cornucopia the rifle that allegedly killed Kennedy, the name of the person alleged to have eliminated top witnesses, and the crème de la crème: a note, supposedly from a former president, congratulating the assassin on a job well done. Many would be leery, but Stone was convinced. "I try not to deal in theories," says Howard. "I deal in the factual evidence that we have."

Howard's job description also included selling the actors (including Costner and Gary Oldman, who plays Lee Harvey Oswald) on the movie's conclusion: Kennedy's murder was planned by the Mob and the CIA, and Oswald was simply a "patsy." (Incidentally, that claim is blazoned on the center's Oswald T-shirt, available through mail order for $19.95.) Although Howard basks in the attention surrounding the film, he doesn't see it as the final word on who killed JFK. "We still investigate the case every day," says Howard, who has been called the Barnum of the conspiracy theory. "We get one phone call a day from people who say they know something. Ten percent maybe pan out, but you never know which ones, so you have to investigate them all. You can tell which ones are for real." The question is, can Stone? *Susan Pocharski*

Oldman as Oswald